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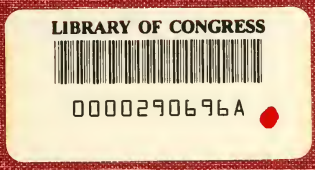
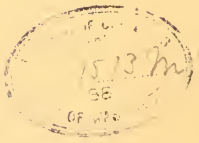


Underneath the Mistletoe

AND OTHER POEMS.

BY EDWARD L. FALES.



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UNDERNEATH THE MISTLETOE.

At last the night has come,
  My hero seeks his rest,
For preparation's busy hum
  Has ceased and pillows may be pressed;
The loaded Christmas-tree
Is ready for the morning's glee.

He is of gentle mind,
  And once was well content
To see his life stream calmly wind,
  Within the same green borders pent;
Its waters ever clear,
Where simple reason did appear.

But that has passed away,
  And he has felt a change,
Which makes occasion for this lay
  And gives his life a wider range,
That it may leap its banks
And sport in passion's lawless pranks.

He ne'er will know again
  The peaceful mind of yore,
The placid flow of spirits when
  True love to him no meaning bore,
Ere yet his bosom felt
Inflaming darts by Cupid dealt.

For he is now in love,
  And with a damsel fair.
No seraph bright in heaven above
  In beauty can with her compare;
At least he thinks so now,
Which, for an argument, allow.

Sometimes she smiles on him,
Or lets him squeeze her hand,
And in the moonlight softly dim
His bashful arm her waist has spanned,
In silence she has heard
Him whisper many a loving word.

Yet for his perfect bliss
There is one other need:
He fain would gain a honeyed kiss,
In which his foolish heart would read
That she his love returned—
The same fond flame in either burned.

His deep desire avails
Him not in his attempt,
For every time his courage fails,
And brings him in his own contempt
That he should fear to speak
Requesting what his longings seek.

Not bashfulness alone
Makes all this paltering,
For in his mind the thought has grown
That possibly such quest may bring
To an untimely end
What joys the Gods already send.

This damsel whom he loves
His passion fails to mold;
Within her heart young turtle-doves
Have never dared their wings to fold;
Her temper seems so cold,
To hope success appears too bold.

And thus do matters stand,
Betwixt the cup and lip,
Because he lacks that gritty sand
Which might suffice to gain the clip.
This dubious way we'll leave
And bring him back to Christmas Eve.

He hies him to his bed,
And prays the angel Sleep
That through the night above his head
The God of Love may vigils keep;
From him he hopes to borrow
The nerve to kiss her on the morrow.

Full soon above him sweep
The angel's heavy wings,
And all his common senses steep
In Lethe's tide; his mind still clings,
Now freed from Fact's dull sway,
To hopes that languished in the day.

And now with merry pace,
In wondrous windings whirled,
His wayward fancies ever chase
Each other through a dreamy world,
Mid scenes so fair, to youth
They seem the mirrored soul of truth.

He treads a princely hall
In style of olden time,
Green holly decks the oaken wall
Where curious antique carvings climb
Round lance and axe and sword
That tell of many a warlike lord.

The pictures pendent there
Of fair and haughty faces,
Whose clear cut features all declare
The high-born blood of vanished races,
Would seem this night to show
A gracious and reviving glow.

Those faces now look down
As they were wont to look
In other days, when arms' renown
Made all the right that men could brook,—
The hearty, good old times
Of Christmas carols, feasts and chimes.

All this he seems to see,
And yet he must not stay
To ponder what their fame may be;
Some subtle charm beguiles away,
Some unseen spirit leads
Him on, but where he slightly heeds.

He treads the polished floors
As if with velvet shod,
Erewhile his airy spirit soars
As if he were a very god
And by his slightest beck
Might hold the sternest fate in check.

For still with merry pace,
In wondrous windings whirled,
His wayward fancies ever chase
Each other through a dreamy world,
Mid scenes so fair, to youth
They seem the mirrored soul of truth.

Through stately rooms he wends
His ever brightening way,
Where every ancient trophy sends
The greeting of some knightly day
When love's and war's alarms
Made havoc with their mingled charms.

And still that unseen force
Impels his willing feet
Along what seems a certain course
To something that is strangely sweet;
Even now his being glows
With what he feels will soon disclose.

A rosy light is shed
Before him on his way;
An arch with ruby curtains spread,
Whose graceful-hanging folds, and gay,
Are slightly drawn aside
And there with golden tassels tied.

One moment comes the old
Unmanly timidness,
And then beneath the red and gold
He bravely steps—then stops, to bless
The scene whose glad surprise
Makes wide and bright his gloating eyes.

Well may he now rejoice,
There waiting for him stands
The only darling of his choice
With smiles, with uplift welcoming hands,
And speaking eyes whose light
Is vastly changed since yesternight.

O joy! above her there
Is hung the mistletoe;
Its shadow on her light-brown hair
Makes lovelier still the conscious glow
On that beloved face,
Revealing passion's new-born grace.

A blood-rebounding hush—
  An all convincing glance—
An eager step—a charming blush—
  Each heart against its love-mate pants—
And then the sweet old story
Of love's first kiss and life's first glory!

'Tis thus with merry pace,
  In wondrous windings whirled,
His wayward fancies ever chase
  Each other through a dreamy world,
Mid scenes so fair, to youth
They seem the mirrored soul of truth.

But all must have an end,
  The morning comes at length,
Those happy dreams in memory send
  Through all his being hope's new strength,
And life seems made of more
Than ever it contained before.

Through all the morning's glee—
  Bright hours that slip away
With kinsfolk at the merry tree,
  Or lonely in the twilight gray,
  His feelings overflow all day
In singing, glad and low,
This song of the mistletoe:

1.

Why regret the childish joys
  For which the merry bells are rung?
Or days of sugar plums and toys
  Found in stockings gaily hung?
For the greatest joy to me
  Any Christmas time can show
Was the kiss I took from thee
  Underneath the mistletoe.

2.

In my heart the chimes now ring
  Sweeter far than bells can sound;
With their melody they bring
  Love's content, for I have found
All I need to happy be,
  Joy and peace so bounteous flow
In the kiss I took from thee
  Underneath the mistletoe.

3.

Ever ringing, still I hear,
Love, the music of thy voice!
Every hour I wish thee near,
In thy smile I would rejoice;
When again its light I see,
I will give thee back, I trow,
That sweet kiss I took from thee
Underneath the mistletoe.

MINNEHAHA.

SUMMER.

Dash the veil of spray
From thy face away,
Greet the smiling day,—
Pretty Minnehaha.

From thy rushing wings,
From thy silver strings,
Sweetest music springs,—
Singing Minnehaha.

Who can fail to see
In thy careless glee
Best philosophy,—
Merry Minnehaha.

Nature's daughter free,
How I long to be
Wild and pure like thee,—
Happy Minnehaha.

The snow-white butterfly
Cannot pass thee by,
But seeks thy mist to die,—
Charming Minnehaha.

When the shadows fall
On thee like a pall,
Still the night-bird's call
Echoes Minnehaha.

I fain would leave the strife
With which this world is rife,
Here to pass my life
Loving Minnehaha.

WINTER.

Hear sweet Laughing Water breaking
Through her icy bound,
All her crystal fetters shaking
With glee that echoes round.
The leafless trees are bowing
Above her frozen stream,
But for all their dreary soughing
Her laughs the lighter seem.

Ever merry in her flowing,
Speaking to the soul,
Laughter all the pathway showing
To happiness the goal—
No brooklet man may cherish,
No fountain ever gushed,
But in thought will sooner perish
When flow and voice are hushed.

LOST OPPORTUNITIES.

One morning, as I strolled a woodland place
And watched the sun's bright arrows glance among
The trees, a saucy bird in passing flung
A zephyr from its wings into my face.
So close it swept with all unfettered grace,
I might have caught it; then it would have sung
Its sweetest songs for me, and to my tongue
Have learned to give reply, and helped to chase
The darkest hours of life from me away.
But no—free on its course allowed to go,
It came no more: like many a happy thought
Which flashes through the mind its glorious ray,
Suggesting springs of light, which never flow,
For in its bird-like flight it is not caught.

THE POOR POET'S GRAVE.

His life-house was built upon sand;
His song-voice was faint and fleeting;
Unlaureled he came to this land
And the summons of death gave him greeting.
All meekly the weeds o'er him wave,
Of perished remembrance a token,
For he sleeps in a pauper's grave
And the strings of his harp are broken.

The warp of one's fame may be fair,
And the woof that should bind it be wanting—
The thought almost wakens despair,
For the fate of poor Patrick is haunting;
But still I must hope and be brave,—
Though I've feelings that cannot be spoken,
When I think of his pauper grave
And the strings of his harp all broken.

ROBIN REDBREASTS.

Listen to the robin redbreasts.
Little Rosebud, do you hear them?
See them glowing mid the branches;
Let us creep up near them.

See that big one on the oak tree,
Proud his rosy front displaying;
Clear and sweet his voice is ringing;
Wonder what he's saying!

Hark, my darling, he will tell us.
O! how gladly he is singing—
Singing from the bending tree-top,
Joyful tidings bringing.

'T is the voice of pulsing springtime,
Woodland melodies awaking,
Speaking through the robin redbreasts,
Happy music making.

Warmer, brighter days are coming;
Lightsome hearts will leap to meet them;
Lift your voice, my Little Rosebud,—
With the birds we'll greet them!

THE TENDER, BROODING TWILIGHT.

The tender, brooding twilight spreads
Above the star reflecting lake,
The silver beams that Hesper sheds
Are dancing in our tremulous wake—
And yet how light we move along;
While, gazing on my fair Lenore,
I do not heed the boisterous song
Of revelers on the shore.

My thoughts are worship, she the shrine
Where all my aspirations rise;
In vain those rival stars may shine,
My beacon-lights are bright blue eyes.
While ministering angels round us throng,
And bless me with my fair Lenore,
Why should I heed the boisterous song
Of revelers on the shore?

'Tis said that o'er each love untold
The smiles of Cupid melt in tears:
My bursting heart I all unfold—
She lifts her eyes, her joy appears,—
And then, as if that look were wrong,
The faltering voice of fair Lenore
Would bid me heed the boisterous song
Of revelers on the shore.

Ah! no, my sweet, this will not do,
Not thus you'll turn me from the track,
For all my thoughts are bound in you,—
What eyes have spoken shall lips take back?
True, dear, you have not known me long,
But well I love my fair Lenore!
Why should I heed the boisterous song
Of revelers on the shore?

For in that look of yours I trace
A melody that heaven might hear,
A sweet refrain of womanly grace,
A soaring bird-song, fresh and clear!
If now your lips to me belong,
Sing love to me, my fair Lenore,
And I'll not heed the boisterous song
Of revelers on the shore.

GOLDEN HAIR.

Some brilliant ray attracts mine eye,
I follow it and here espy
A golden hair upon my sleeve!
From what fair star did you receive
That silken sheen, so soft, so bright,
Reminding of some past delight?
She surely had a pretty head
Who dropped this fine and glossy thread;
Yet whence it came, or when 'twas shed,

Or why upon my arm it fell,
Is more in truth than I can tell.
Its sunny glance enchains mine eye
And cunningly it makes reply:
"Why foolishly and vainly try
To shirk the blame, or thus imply
That only by the play of chance
Do I this morning meet your glance
In such an odd, unheard of spot?
Such week deceit becomes you not.
No sleeve e'er bears these golden hairs
Without a cause or unawares.
Did not her curls, with careless grace,
Sweep gently o'er this very place
Last evening when the light burned low
And two young hearts were all aglow?
O, never fear! it will be clear
To all who see me shining here,
And they will ask what maiden fair
Has left with you this golden hair!"

FAIRY TALES.

I am reminded of the many hours
Which I have passed deep in your witching lore,
For in my boyish heart you beheld—before
Your elfin queens had lost their magic powers—
Most high and royal state; your woodland bowers,
Your moon-lit dances on the charm bound floor
Were real to me, and I did love to pore
Enrapt o'er stories strange of golden showers
By fairy wands on Fortune's children shed;
And in my innocence I sometimes dreamed
That I might be of them. Ah! long since fled
My faith in things which once so natural seemed;
Yet still within my heart, though reason rails,
I wish you might be true, sweet fairy tales!

SLOWLY THE WESTERN SUN.

Slowly the western sun is declining,
Slowly the shades are gathering around,
While through the haze the beam latest shining
Gives to each cloud a golden bound,
Taking the place of silvery lining.

Lightly the stillness of night is creeping;
Spirits of peace now brood in the gloam;
Gone is the day, with joy or with weeping,
Bringing the hour of rest at home,
Bringing the sweet refreshment of sleeping.

Tenderly now my heart is o'erflowing,
Thinking of all the suns that have set;
Viewing the past, with all its good showing.
Gratitude's tears my lashes wet,
Soft as the dew which evening is sowing.

THE FALLS OF ST. ANTHONY.

Grand old stream!
You never rest, but constantly flow
From the calm above to the riot below.
A sweep to the edge,
A leap from the ledge—
Down, down, down you go,
To roar mid the ragged rocks below.
Roar, roar, roar!
With a mighty voice; but its deepest tone
Sounds to me like a giant's groan.

You well may groan.
The works of man, in a gold-greedy time,
Have laid their chains on the waters sublime;
No more, no more
As wild as before—
Down, down, down you go,
To roar mid the ragged rocks below.
Chained, chained, chained,
While the years go by; still the saddest tone
Of that noble voice never sinks to a moan.

NO KISS FONDLY WAITING FOR ME.

Of the days that will never return,
In sorrow I'm dreaming to-night;
How my heart did impatiently burn
As I watched every day take its flight,
Bringing nearer the sweet, blissful hour
When we met 'neath the old garden tree,
And I claimed from her lips' budding flower
The kiss fondly waiting for me.

But her love did not last like my own,
It was formed in a far weaker mold,
My poor heart nearly burst with its moan
When I found her affection grown cold.
About me the shadows have crept,
And sad will my heart ever be,
Since I heard from those lips that she kept
No kiss fondly waiting for me.

Of a maiden so cruel—so sweet—
In sorrow I'm dreaming to-night,
And the scorn my caressings did meet
In my heart like a serpent doth bite.
There is nothing can chase from my brow
The gloom resting there, for I see
No darling to welcome me now,
No kiss fondly waiting for me.

TEAR AND SMILE.

The flowers of spring are young and bright,
And deck themselves in smiles of light.
O stars of day, forever stay!
Through all the air the moisture rare
Gathers in rain-drops for the hour
When blossoms fair shall drink the shower,
And droop beneath the glistening wet
Like precious stones with sea-pearls set.
The smiles of youth are joy's warm breath,
And when they play the spirit saith,
These are too gay to pass away.
Under the lid there still lie hid
Tear-drops waiting for the hour
When sorrows bid them freely shower.
Lip and dimple but dissemble
The wrinkling care, the piteous tremble.
When flowers must die, 'tis with a sigh
We see their petals fall apart,
And smiles that fade will leave a shade
Upon the face and in the heart.
All do not die, all do not fade;
When by-and-by our fears are laid,
See new life springing everywhere.
The tears that rise in sad young eyes
Refine the smiles that linger there;
From cooling rain and transient glooming

The flowers burst forth in fresher blooming;
From sorrows borne, from conquered duty,
The smile shall leap in purer beauty.
Tear and smile
Are sister blessings all the while,
And sisterly may dwell together
As sunbeams shine on dewy heather.

BABY AND GRANDPA.

Let the baby come to grandpa!
See the old face light with joy,
While his trembling arms outstretching
To receive our baby boy.

Mother's little tramp is started,
Toddling across the floor with glee.
Will he tumble? No! he's safely
Riding now on grandpa's knee.

Deep his chubby fists he buries
In the patriarchal beard.
Soon the joyous eyes that watch him
By the searching thumbs are speared.

Grandpa groans in false lamenting,
And a tear unbidden flows,
While with wicked triumph dancing,
Lustily our baby crows!

Happy baby! Little recks he
Why the aged blood runs slow;
Nothing knows he of the troubles
Which have crowned that head with snow.

Boyhood's days are all before him;
Happier days ne'er come through life;
Are we better when they leave us
Warriors in the world's hard strife?

Look at grandpa! Playful, merry,
Seems he not a boy again?
Don't his ruddy, beaming features
Tell us life is not in vain?

Blessed are the hours of childhood,
Whether in life's morn or eve,—
And the future holds some pleasure
For us all, we may believe.

Give the baby then to grandpa;
Surely none has better right;
See, the winsome baby prattle
Makes the old face look so bright.

THE RIVER-LAKE.

After the cooling shower
Soft is the twilight hour
On the river-lake.
Sweetly the plaintive note
Gushes from whippoorwill's throat,
Gently, gently we float,
Light as a fine snowflake,
Down the river-lake.

The dripping oars at rest
Their murmurous music wake,
And ripple o'er the breast
Of the peaceful river-lake.

The lovely shadows fall
Like a sin-outshutting wall
On the river-lake,
Charming the hour and place.
The holiness we trace
In nature's quiet grace
Makes sacred for her sake
All on the river-lake.
O this is purest joy!
This it is that makes
Me love the wide St. Croix,
The river-lake of lakes.

ALONE.

To-night my heart is weeping;
I think how all my joys are flown,
How sorrow's chill is o'er me creeping,
How dark my days have grown,—
And hope within me dying,
Whose promise once so brightly shone,
Heeds not my anguished soul-voice crying
O leave me not alone!

The phantoms round me thronging,
In all their garbs familiar dight,
Nor satisfy the speechless longing
Nor gratify the sight,
For they increase the welling
Of thoughts now crushing in their might,
And to my prostrate heart keep telling
How lone I am to-night.

ADIEU, LITTLE ROSEBUD.

Adieu, Little Rosebud, adieu!
My only sad parting is this,
For I leave with regret none but you.
Come, give me one sweet little kiss!
'Twill be long ere my lips lose the thrill.
'Tis gladness to know there is one—pure and true—
One darling to think of me still.

Farewell to the lips that are cold,
Farewell to the hearts that forget;
My affections have lost every hold
Save the arms of my innocent pet,—
And now I must sever this too.
No cruel farewell shall unloose the dear fold,
But O, Little Rosebud—adieu!

IN FANCY BLEST.

My spirit soars on pinions light
Beyond the life that would confine,
And now are all the joys of bright
And perfect vision mine.

I feel no more the night of pain,
Since fortune walks no more with fate;
The flower of love reveals no stain,
And hearts admit no hate.

If life were sweet in every breath,
What soul would long from earth to fly?
If happiness were found in death,
Who would not dare to die?

In life perfection is not found,
While death is only perfect rest;
Then let me quit this gloomy bound
And be in fancy blest!

ON THE DEATH OF BRYANT.

Her sons in sorrow bow,
For Nature's poet in the tomb is laid;
His pen is rusting now,
But never will its hallowed tracings fade.

That sacred, honored name
Within our grateful hearts can never die;
His fair, enduring fame
Will shine even brighter as the years roll by.

His songs are numbered all,
He cannot charm us with another rhyme,
For he has heard the call
Of Death, and met the sharpened scythe of Time.

But truly he has won
As goodly fruitage as the very best;
And now his race is run,
We feel that he has nobly earned his rest.

Our deepest thanks belong
To the fair day that saw his happy birth,—
A bard of purest song
Now sleeps for aye upon the breast of earth.

The sunset hues begin to fade away,
The rosy cloud-tips one by one are fled,
And billowy folds of quiet, sober gray
Are drivieg from the sky all trace of red.
The musky twilight is so calmly sped
We scarcely know when it has taken its flight;
But now the clouds are parting overhead,
Revealing wells of azure deeply bright,
And through their vistas peep the twinkling stars of night.

TO THE EVENING STAR.

Shine on, sweet star! a pearl on high,
That glistens from the shell of night—
Together nigh, my love and I
Are folded in thy tender light.

Shine on, sweet star! so whitely pure,
How steadily thy beams incline;
Yet do thy very best, I'm sure
My love will truer, purer shine.

Shine on, sweet star! and know that she
Beside me now is sweeter far,
And her dear eyes more bright to me
Than all the heavenly star-hosts are.

Shine on, sweet star! but never speak
Of curious sounds that reach thee now,
When I salute her willing cheek
And in her ear my love avow.

Shine on, sweet star! that seems content
To shed thy ray at close of day.
Like thee—with hearts in rapture blent—
We peaceful pass the hours away.

A NIGHT SONG.

A spirit of peace guards the river to-night
While the winds and the waves are asleep,
And the stars overhead throw a richly dim light
On the glassy yet swift gliding deep,
Making softer the shadows that fringe the dark shore,
Making mellow the lights mirrored there,
And returning to them—lovelier far than before—
All the radiance they lost in the air.

If my days ran as smooth as the river below,
If my heart were as pure as the sky,
Not a soul wandering forth in this night's early glow
Would enjoy its delight more than I;
If the scene could but shed its contentment on me,
Could my breast make a dwelling for peace,
The happiest night of my life this would be,
And the song on my lips would not cease.

THE END.

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